

VZCZCXRO5056

OO RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGA RUEHGD RUEHHA RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL
RUEHQU RUEHRD RUEHRG RUEHRS RUEHTM RUEHVC
DE RUEHUB #0336/01 1132056
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 222056Z APR 08
FM USINT HAVANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3168
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS IMMEDIATE
RUCOGCA/NAVSTA GUANTANAMO BAY CU IMMEDIATE
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3169

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000336

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2017

TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: DAMAS DEFIANT AFTER POLICE BREAK UP PROTEST

REF: HAVANA 333

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly : For reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with COM today, Laura Pollan, spokesperson for the Cuban organization Ladies in White, stated that her arms and shoulders are still sore after police yesterday roughly broke up a protest by Pollan and nine supporters. However, Pollan and fellow Dama Berta Soler were defiant of Cuban government efforts to silence them, stating that they would continue to demonstrate for the release of political prisoners. Another Dama, Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva, contacted USINT to say that, after her involvement in the protest, she is under close scrutiny of state security and is barred from participating in further political activity. The Cuban government, after a silence of several hours following yesterday's incident, initiated a media campaign to brand the Damas as paid agents of the United States. State television played excerpts of a tapped phone conversation between Pollan and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen in an effort to brand the Damas as agents of the "Miami-mafia". The Damas stated clearly that they are not ashamed of the support of the United States or of any democratic country. End Summary.

12. (C) Laura Pollan, spokesperson for Damas de Blanco, showed the COM and USINT Human Rights Officer that she had considerable swelling on her upper shoulder after police roughly removed her from a sit down protest in Havana's Revolution Square (reftel). Pollan stated that Colonel Samper of Cuban State Security told her in the past that her group could never protest in Revolution Square and she was proud that the ten members of the organization defied the order to disperse delivered by the same Colonel Samper. Pollan and her colleague, Berta Soler, stated defiantly that they will continue to protest in public.

13. (C) Also today, Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva, who likewise participated in yesterday's protest, called from her hometown of Perico, Matanzas to say that she was taken home the previous day by three Ministry of the Interior officials. The civilian vehicle followed an official car in which rode a high ranking military officer. They were met in Perico by local Communist Party members and persons from the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. One of the Ministry of Interior officials instructed the group to watch

Garcia closely because she is not allowed to leave town. Garcia related that while there was no police presence in front of her house, she was being closely watched. She said that she called Tania Morejon Soca, another participant in the protest, who lives in a neighboring town, and she reported that she is under similar close scrutiny by the authorities.

14. (C) Cuba media did not report on the incident until 12:50 AM April 22 (i.e. the day after the event) when an announcer on a state television news broadcast described the incident as a provocation by a "small group of mercenaries in the pay of the Empire." The announcer stated that police had acted to avoid a violent conflict. This statement was reprinted in today's edition of the official government newspaper Granma. Cuban television broadcast footage of the Damas with the COM and aired excerpts of a recent conversation tapped off Pollan's phone with Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, alleging that the Congresswoman had provoked the incident with the assistance of the Cuban-American "mafia" in Florida.

15. (C) Pollan and Soler stated that they are not ashamed of any connections with any representative of the U.S. government and would welcome the support of any democratic country. They told the COM and HR Officer that they do not think that the average Cuban believes that they are 'paid terrorists in the pay of the US government', and that many ordinary Cubans recognize the justice of their cause. They vowed to continue their protests, but indicated that will probably continue to conduct them on a small scale to maintain secrecy and prevent preemptive disruption by the government.

16. (C) Comment: The GOC media response seemed clumsy and

HAVANA 00000336 002 OF 002

hastily written. It appears that the COC was caught completely off guard by Damas protest.
PARMLY